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**FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS IN THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE**

**A Thesis**

**Presented to**

**The Faculty of the Department of Human Performance**

**San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirement for the Degree**

**Master of Arts**

**by**

**Joi Dawson**

**May 2004**

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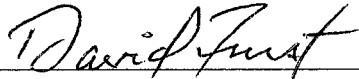
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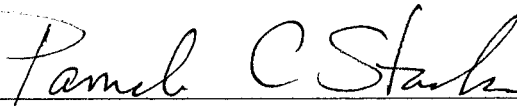
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **FEMALE ATHLETIC TRAINERS IN THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE**

by Joi Dawson

This study measured the opinions of athletic trainers employed in the NFL in the spring of 2000 concerning the future, repercussions, and logistics of the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs. The research supports the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs in the future. A Likert scale was used to measure the opinions of 96 full-time athletic trainers with a return rate of 28%. A majority of those surveyed agreed that repercussions would arise from the addition of female athletic trainers to the all-male athletic training staffs, and that there would have to be logistical changes to accommodate female athletic trainers. However, most agreed that there would be a female athletic trainer working for an NFL team in the future.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTON

According to the Athletic Training Program Graduates Placement Summary published in the NATA News (1998), 712 athletic trainers graduated from accredited graduate athletic training education programs between 1994–1998. Forty-nine percent ( $n = 347$ ) of those graduates were women. Of the female graduates, none secured jobs in professional sports, whereas 21 (3%) of their male counterparts did. Four thousand six hundred and twenty athletic training students graduated from an entry-level accredited undergraduate athletic training program during that same 5-year period. Forty-eight (2%) of the men were employed in professional sports, while four women (less than 1%) worked in professional sports. The employment statistics comparing males to females in college, high school, and clinics were virtually equal. Although female athletic trainers number almost half of all incoming athletic trainers, job placement in professional sports is not equivalent.

The history of athletic training for women began with women simply covering women's sports (Rudd, 1997). Rudd goes on to state that in the early days male and female athletic training rooms were housed in separate facilities. According to Rudd, it was believed that female athletic trainers could not effectively supervise men. This stereotype of the female athletic trainer created a barrier that excluded women from being hired for athletic training jobs that involved all men's sports. According to several professional players, football was a forbidden field for women athletic trainers (Pollak, 1992).

This hiring trend has changed at the high school and college levels, but has yet to change at the professional level. Examples of the explanations given for the inability of females to secure employment in the NFL are: the athletic training room being in or adjacent to the men's locker room, the incidents of sexual harassment, the comfort of the male athletes with female athletic trainers, and the lack of confidence in a female athletic trainer's ability (Tom, 1992).

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the future for female athletic trainers, repercussions, and the logistics of adding female athletic trainers to the NFL athletic training staff.

### Need for the Study

Based on a review using the Infotrac, Sports Discus, and Google search engines, no studies were found dealing with female athletic trainers and football athletes. The employment statistics show women are not represented as athletic trainers in the NFL. It is illegal to deny opportunity based on the sex of the applicant. Numerous reasons have been given to justify the exclusion of female athletic trainers. Due to the increase in pay, the prestige, and the perks that are afforded to athletic trainers for professional football teams, it is unfair to deny that opportunity based on the sex of the applicant.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to measure the opinions of athletic trainers currently employed in the NFL concerning the future, repercussions, and logistics of the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs.

### Limitations

In the design of this study, certain limitations were accepted that might compromise the outcome:

1. The truthfulness of the answers reported by the NFL athletic trainers.
2. The surveys that were returned may not reflect the opinions of NFL athletic trainers as a whole.
3. The return rate was 28%.

### Delimitations

In the design of this study certain delimitations were established.

1. The study was delimited to athletic trainers currently employed in the NFL.
2. The study was delimited to the use of a written questionnaire mailed to the athletic trainers.

## Research Questions

This study will examine the following 3 research questions:

1. What is the future of female athletic trainers on NFL athletic training staff?
2. What are the repercussions of adding female athletic trainers to the NFL athletic training staff?
3. What are the logistic of adding a female athletic trainer to NFL athletic training staffs?

## Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions have been used:

Athletic Trainer. An athletic trainer is an individual, certified or non-certified, designated to provide care and prevention for athletic illness and injures (Arnheim & Prentice, 1997).

Certified Athletic Trainer. A Certified Athletic Trainer is an individual that has successfully passed the National Athletic Training Associations Board of Certifications exam (Arnheim & Prentice, 1997).

Future. Future is used to mean the time yet to come.

Logistics. The physical design and the behavioral practice that currently exist in the athletic training room.

National Athletic Training Association. The National Athletic Training Association is a not-for-profit organization that administers the NATA Board of

National Athletic Training Association. The National Athletic Training Association is a not-for-profit organization that administers the NATA Board of Certification exam, publishes the Journal of Athletic Training, and holds an annual convention (Arnheim & Prentice, 1997).

Repercussions. Contraindications are the objections or changes that may occur in the athletic training room.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

When examining the status of female athletic trainers in the NFL, it is essential to understand the logistics of NFL facilities (i.e., the athletic training room is located in or adjacent to the men's locker room). The possible repercussions of the addition of female athletic trainers into an all-male workplace must also be considered.

No studies have been located that investigated the lack of opportunities for females on NFL athletic training staffs. There has been research conducted on the emergence of females as athletic trainers (Herrick, 1994), and Pollack published an article on the experiences of the female sports reporter covering football (1992). The following sections address: 1) history of the NATA; 2) history of the female athletic trainer; 3) male opinions of women in the men's locker room; 4) male opinions of female athletic trainers; and 5) female athletic trainers working in professional sports.

#### **History of Athletic Training**

According to Arnheim and Prentice (1997), athletic training in the United States came into existence with the establishment of organized athletics at the collegiate level. The early athletic trainers had no technical background; their techniques consisted of rubdowns and home remedies. Following World War I, the field of athletic training began to evolve. Bilik, a physician, wrote the first major text on athletic training and care of athletic injuries called *The Trainer's Bible* in 1917.

In 1920 the Cramer family began making products to treat athletic injuries and illnesses. By 1932 the Cramer Company began publishing the First Aider, a newsletter to enhance communication between coaches, athletic trainers, and athletes. By the late 1930's efforts were being made by several colleges and universities to establish a national organization for athletic training. In 1950 the first athletic training convention was held in Kansas City, Missouri, with the primary purpose of establishing standards for the profession of athletic training. The National Athletic Trainer's Association was a result of this meeting.

In 1962 the National Athletic Trainers Associated Board of Certification (NATABOC), in conjunction with the American Public Health Association's Professional Examination Services, developed and administered a certification examination in an attempt to transform athletic training from a trade into a profession. Initially, the test consisted of 150 multiple-choice questions on such topics as anatomy, physiology, prevention of injury, first aid, recognition of injury, and treatment techniques. Today the NATABOC and Columbia Assessment Services, Inc. administer the certification examination four times a year. The examination now covers four domains: 1) prevention of athletic injuries; 2) recognition, evaluation, and immediate care of injuries; 3) rehabilitation; and 4) professional development and responsibilities. Those who successfully complete the examination are considered Certified Athletic Trainers, (ATCs) (Arnheim & Prentice, 1997).



## Sexual Discrimination

There are employment discrimination laws that are designed to prevent discrimination based on the applicant's sex. Employment discrimination is the practice of showing bias in hiring, promotion, job assignment, termination, compensation, and harassment. Most discrimination laws are composed of federal and state statutes; however, the United States Constitution includes protection when the employer is a government body or the government has fostered the discriminatory practice (Code of Federal Regulations, 2003).

The Constitution does not govern discrimination in the private sector, but there are a number of federal and state statutes. The Equal Pay Act amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1963 provides that equal pay must be paid for equal work, regardless of the sex of the employee. Companies that engage in interstate commerce with more than 15 employees are governed by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibits discrimination based on sex, including pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions. The act makes it illegal for employers to discriminate in hiring, discharging, compensation, or terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. Congress passed Title IX in 1972 prohibiting discrimination against girls and women in federally funded education, including in athletic programs (Code of Federal Regulations, 2003). The code of ethics of the National Athletic Training Association states that members shall not discriminate against any legally protected class (2003).

## History of Female Athletic Trainers

Herrick's (1994) study of the historical development of the female athletic trainer traces the evolution of the first female ATC through 1980. The first female to become a member of the National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA) was Dorothy Cohen in 1966. The first female to successfully pass the NATA Board of Certification (BOC) exam was Sherry Koseck Badagian in 1972. At this time, female ATCs were viewed as athletic trainers for female athletes only (Herrick, 1994).

In an article by Hunt in NATA News (1999), Marjorie Albohm was featured as a member of the NATA Hall of Fame. As an athlete in college, Albohm did not receive injury care comparable to the care male athletes received. The male athletic trainers would come to the female athletic training room after the completion of the men's practices and attend to the female athletes. It was apparent to Albohm that the type of care that was being afforded to the male athletes should also be provided to their female counterparts. This observation led Albohm to pursue a career in athletic training.

Karen Toburen is also a member of the NATA Hall of Fame and a pioneer in the field of athletic training (Hunt, 1999a). Toburen credits the passage of Title IX in 1972 as the turning point for female athletic trainers. Toburen served as an athletic trainer for female athletes only.

Women were initially hired as athletic trainers for women's athletics only (Anderson, 1992). According to Anderson, women were viewed as athletic trainers for female athletes and were never considered for jobs working with male athletes. In an article in Pollack (1992), Diane Benjamin, athletic trainer for the Continental Basketball

Association's Rochester Renegade, says it takes guts to be the first and it is not safe taking that plunge.

In the same article, Pollack quotes Anita Clark, assistant athletic trainer at the University of Oklahoma, as she recounts her experience as a student athletic trainer at Auburn University. Clark was told by the assistant athletic trainer Herb Waldrop, "It's [football] not a place for a young lady to be." Clark says she still does not believe that women are welcomed in men's sports (Pollack, 1992, 14c).

The stereotype of the first female athletic trainers who worked with male athletes was that they were "either whores or homosexuals," said Maria Hutsick of Boston University in an article in USA Today by Denise Tom (1992). Hutsick remembers her experience as one of the first women to work Division 1-AA football at BU; she threw up every day because she and the football coaches frequently clashed.

In an article by Biemiller (1993), Carol Roger explains her experience as an athletic trainer at Division I, University of California, Berkeley. Though Rogers has been accused of disturbing the privacy of the men's athletic training room, she has proven to be successful. Obstacles such as location of the athletic training room and the discomfort of the male athletes in the presence of female athletic trainers have been overcome.

Female athletic training students were also denied the opportunity to get experience with male sports, consequently limiting their professional preparation. Non-discrimination based on sex is a policy of both Title IX and the NATA, but the male athletic training room remained off limits until the 1990's. Many job vacancies required football exposure, which the female athletic trainers did not have. Without critical

experience as a student athletic trainer under the supervision of an experienced ATC, the female applicants would be unprepared if they were offered jobs working with football (Anderson, 1992).

### Males' Opinions of Females in the Men's Locker Room

Male athletes view their locker room as more than a place to shower and change clothes. Michael Williams of the San Jose SaberCats Arena Football team, with regards to the locker room, was quoted in an article by Jeff Carlick as saying, "It's just you and your guys" (Arenaball Magazine, 1999, 2). Women in men's locker rooms, which is where some of the athletic training rooms are located in male professional sports, is a concern of the athletes and male athletic trainers. Men's negative reaction to women in their locker room may be due to a perceived lack of power to forbid women from being allowed into their locker room (Disch & Kane, 1996).

Denise Tom in a USA Today article quotes Ashley, the Vancouver Canucks athletic trainer and a member of the Professional Hockey Athletic Trainers Association, as saying, "I don't really think that it's a place for the female." Ashley goes on to say, "It's no reflection on their capabilities as a professional, but from having 20 years of pro hockey experience, my opinion is a gut feeling. It's the environment, the travel, the team situation" (Tom, 1992, 14C).

In the same USA Today article, Don Beaupre of the Washington Capitals was quoted as saying, "The dressing room is like the bedroom: If it's not comfortable, that will affect how you relax and work. The first thing I'd think of is how would my wife

feel? I don't think she'd be too comfortable with it" (Tom, 1992, 14C). The issue of the comfort level of the athletes was also addressed in same article by the Washington Capitals defenseman Kevin Hatcher, "At this level it's important for the guys to feel as comfortable as possible. The biggest concern is if the guys would feel comfortable" ("What pros think future will bring," 1992, 14C). At the University of Oklahoma, Tink Collins, as a senior wide receiver football player, felt that male athletes had to wear shorts and watch what they said with the presence of a female in the locker room. With an all-male environment these are not concerns (Tom, 1992, 14C).

The Pittsburgh Steelers' head athletic trainer John Norwig views professional sports facilities as inconvenient for female athletic trainers. Though in college the locker rooms and the athletic training rooms are separate, avoiding the possibility of females seeing nude male athletes, in the NFL their facilities do not allow for privacy (Tom, 1992). Problems could be caused by women athletic trainers in the men's locker room, "because the things that do go on in the locker room," said then Chicago Bulls center Will Perdue (1992, 14C).

Female athletic trainers are not the only professional women who have been faced with the obstacle of entering the male locker room in an attempt to perform their jobs. Female reporters have had an ongoing problem entering the men's locker room. Several high-profile sexual harassment cases have been filed as a result of the reluctance to accept female reporters in the male locker room.

Despite the 1978 ruling by U.S. District Judge Constance Baler Motley that "barring a reporter from a locker room would put her at a 'severe competitive

disadvantage' in doing her job" (Himmelberg, 1991, 65), incidents continue to arise. Bob Knight cited an Indiana University policy and evicted a female sportswriter from the Indiana basketball locker room after the basketball team defeated Notre Dame. The reporter had been conducting postgame interviews in the locker room for 3 years (Scher, 1991).

The most noted case of sexual harassment of a female reporter is the case of Lisa Olson of the Boston Herald. While doing post-game interviews in the New England Patriots locker room, several of the team members allegedly exposed themselves to her, and one invited physical contact. To compound the issue, the team owner called Olson an obscene name. A \$72,500 fine was imposed by the National Football League (NFL) against the Patriots. Olson received life-threatening calls and continued harassment that caused her to move to Australia (Himmelberg, 1991).

The NFL Tampa Bay Buccaneers player Jimmy Williams shoved sportswriter Michelle Kaufman from in front of his locker, causing her to lurch forward, almost falling. After pushing Kaufman, Williams said, "You don't belong in here" (King, 1993, 98).

In general, the research reflects several issues as probable causes for this type of hostility: lack of mutual respect, lack of common sense, frustration, feelings of invasion of privacy, and a one-way enforcement of sexual discrimination laws. A solution offered to attain equal access to the locker room would be for the male athletes to wear towels or bathrobes (Himmelberg, 1991).

When Susan Fornoff started as a sports reporter for the Oakland A's she received a gift-wrapped rat from Dave Kingman, a member of the team (Fornoff, 1993). Another team member was quoted as saying, "baseball is a fraternity of men that women can not be a part of" (Fornoff, 1993, 120). Despite the rough beginning, Fornoff's experiences were not all negative. Fornoff recounts several positive events and lifelong friends she made as a sports reporter.

Tracy Dobbs has been a sportswriter for over 20 years and has a different outlook on the sexual harassment issue. Dobbs believes that athletes will test reporters. Male sportswriters get harassed also, it just is not sexually. Dobbs responds with confidence and humor to the few times that athletes have challenged her in locker rooms. Dobbs recounts an incident when an athlete bared himself to her and said, "Do you know what this is?" Dobbs responded with, "It looks like a penis, only smaller." Dobbs says, "You roll with it and make a joke out of it. You don't go whine away because they [athletes] are trying you, challenging you, attempting to intimidate you" (Stein, 1991, 8). Sexual harassment incidents against female sports writers in men's locker rooms have decreased as the number of female sports writers has increased (Stein, 1991).

#### Male Athletes' Opinions of Female Athletic Trainers

When asked if it is awkward to work with a female athletic trainer, John Fina, an offensive lineman, for the Buffalo Bills said, "No. In fact, we had a number of women on the [University of Arizona] staff. Anytime you go in the training room, you're wearing shorts." Fina went on to say that it would not bother him to have a female athletic trainer

as a professional football player as long as she was hired based on her qualifications as an athletic trainer (Tom, 1992, 14C). Tom quoted Joel Steed of the Pittsburgh Steelers; “I don’t see anything wrong with it. I think it’s about time. I feel they can do just as good a job as a man.” The article also quoted Darryl Talley of the Buffalo Bills as saying, “If we were to have a female trainer here, as long as she’s competent, it wouldn’t bother me.... I wouldn’t be more inclined to go to a male trainer instead.” Tunch Ilkin, a veteran with the Pittsburgh Steelers, has mixed feeling, “In this league, where there’s usually only a couple of trainers [with a team], you can’t separate what’s going on in there [athletic training room] and ... I don’t see that it’s a good idea (Tom, 1992, 14C).

There have been two high-profile incidents of sexual harassment of female athletic trainers. The case of the first round draft pick in the 1997 NFL draft, Peyton Manning, is one. While Manning was a senior at the University of Tennessee he was reported to have exposed his bare buttocks to Jamie Whited, a female athletic trainer. Whited was awarded a \$300,000 settlement from the university (“Chatter,” 1997).

Lynn Conley, an assistant athletic trainer at Nebraska University, alleged that Head Athletic Trainer George Sullivan, Assistant Athletic Trainer Jerry Weber, and Team Physician, Lonnie Albers took punitive measures against her after she filed her original discrimination law suit in the fall of 1991. Conley was the only female athletic trainer at the time of the incident (“Ex-NU trainer files lawsuit,” 1994, 25).



## Female Athletic Trainers Working in Professional Sports

In the NATA District 8 Far West Newsletter (1998), lack of opportunity in professional sports and lack of high-profile athletic training jobs was cited as the second leading concern of female athletic trainers (Sweet, 1998). Though the lack of opportunities is a common complaint, a select few women have broken into professional sports.

Donna Papangellin, ATC, is the athletic trainer for the San Francisco Giants' AAA Phoenix Firebirds. When informed of Papangellin's position, Daniel Wheat, ATC, the head athletic trainer for the Rangers, which is also part of the San Francisco Giants' system, was surprised to hear that there was a female on their sportsmedicine staff. Athletic trainers from other minor league teams reported that she is doing a good job. Papangellin was ribbed initially, but when it came to their treatment, the athletes felt that "she knows her stuff" (Knoeber, 1997, 24).

## Summary

The review of literature demonstrated a need for research into the issues that are keeping female athletic trainers out of the NFL athletic training rooms. Though there have been great advances made for women in the field of athletic training, women still are not afforded the career opportunities of their male counterparts.

There have been incidents of sexual harassment of females in the men's locker room, and some still believe that women are not welcomed as athletic trainers for football. Yet there are some who have overcome the obstacles and become athletic

trainers at the professional level. This study was designed to identify opinions of the athletic trainers currently employed in the NFL with regards to the future of female athletic trainers in the NFL, as well as the repercussions and the logistics of the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

The purpose of this study was to measure the opinions of athletic trainers currently employed in the NFL of the future, repercussions, and logistics of the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs.

#### **Participants**

All athletic trainers (n= 96) employed in the NFL during the spring of 2000 were mailed surveys and follow-up surveys. The return rate was 28%.

#### **Survey Construction**

An initial interview with an athletic trainer currently employed in the NFL, who wishes to remain anonymous, was the first step in developing the survey. Three factors appeared to encompass the majority of concerns expressed in the interview and the data collected in the review of literature. Questions were developed based on those three factors: future of female athletic trainers in the NFL; repercussions of the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs, and the logistics of the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs. A Likert scale was used. The athletic trainer from the initial interview was given the survey and asked for his feedback. Some of the questions were reworded; questions were added and deleted based on that feedback. Validity was checked by giving the survey, along with a second form that asked those surveyed to place the questions into one of the three factors (future of female

athletic trainers in the NFL, repercussions of the adding female athletic trainers to NFL staff, and logistics of adding female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staff), to three male athletic trainers employed at San Jose State University and the athletic trainer currently employed in the NFL (Appendix A). The San Jose State male athletic trainers comprised the head athletic trainer, the assistant athletic trainer, and one graduate athletic training student, selected randomly.

### Administration of Survey

The head athletic trainer for each of the 31 NFL teams was mailed a survey packet (Appendix B). The packet contained a cover letter and a survey with informed consent form and self-addressed stamped envelope attached to it for each member of the athletic training staff. The cover letter explained the survey and requested the athletic trainers' participation. The surveys were returned via self-addressed stamped envelopes. Two months following the initial mailing, a follow-up letter was sent (Appendix C), along with an additional survey, informed consent form, and self-address stamped envelope to the 31 head athletic trainers.

### Statistical Procedures

Descriptive statistics were calculated using SSPS 9.0. The frequency and percent response rate are reported in Table 1 of Chapter 4. Qualitative data were also reported.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to analyze the opinions of NFL athletic trainers employed in the spring of 2000 concerning the future, repercussions, and logistics of adding female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs. The study was needed because after a search using Infotrac, Sports Discus, and Google search engines, there was no research found on the status of the female athletic trainer in the NFL.

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

The following descriptive statistics were calculated using SPSS for Windows 97, version 9.0 software. According to the Professional Football Athletic Training Society 1997 Media Guide, there are 31 teams in the NFL with a total of 96 full-time athletic trainers. Twenty-two of those teams have three full-time athletic trainers, six have two full-time athletic trainers, and three teams have four full-time athletic trainers. Those teams with two or three full-time athletic trainers were mailed three surveys and those with four were mailed four. A follow-up letter was mailed to each team with one additional survey. A total of 96 surveys were mailed, not including the extra survey included with the follow-up letter.

Twenty-eight percent (25 surveys) of the NFL athletic trainers returned the surveys based on the 96 full-time athletic trainers. Two of the surveys were returned with a note refusing to participate and two surveys were returned with all questions answered

“neither agree nor disagree.” Of the surveys returned, 23% (21 surveys) were usable.

The outcome of the NFL Athletic Trainers Survey is found in Table 1.

### The future of female athletic trainers in the NFL

Sixty percent of those surveyed marked agree when asked if there will be female athletic trainers in the NFL despite the potential barriers, 20% marked neither agree nor disagree, 15% marked strongly agree, and 5% marked disagree. Sixty-five percent marked agree when asked if the addition of female athletic trainers to the NFL staff would be a slow process, 20% marked neither agree nor disagree, and 15% marked strongly agree. Fifty percent marked agree to the questions about the increased opportunities for female athletic trainers at the collegiate level creating more opportunities in the NFL, 20% marked strongly agree, 20% marked neither agree nor disagree, and 10% marked disagree.

Sixty-five percent marked agree to the question addressing networking as a pivotal part of securing a job in the NFL, 25% marked strongly agree, and 10% marked neither agree nor disagree. Sixty-five percent marked agree when asked if NFL athletes who have had previous experience with female athletic trainers would have a positive effect on the acceptance of female athletic trainers, 20% marked strongly agree, 10% marked neither agree nor disagree, and 5% marked disagree.

The first research question sought to explore the future of female athletic trainers on NFL athletic training staffs. Seventy-five percent reported strongly agree or agree there are barriers for female athletic trainers in the NFL, 80% reported strongly agree or

agree that the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL staffs would be a slow process, and 70% reported strongly agree or agree that increased opportunity at the collegiate level will create more opportunities in the NFL. Ninety percent reported strongly agree or agree that networking is pivotal and 85% reported strongly agree or agree that NFL athletes that have had previous experience with female athletic trainers will have a positive effect in the acceptance of female athletic trainers. The increased numbers of female athletic trainers entering the field coupled with the increased opportunities at the collegiate level are often given in support of female athletic trainers entering the NFL, (Pollak, 1992).

When asked the effects of having a female athletic trainer in college on the acceptance of a female athletic they trainer in the NFL, eighty-five percent reported agree or strongly agree. In the USA Today article by Pollak (1992), Pat Troesch, assistant athletic trainer at Miami University was quoted as saying, “change won’t happen until the current crop of young athletes, who are growing up with female trainers and ‘think nothing of it,’ reaches the pro level ... that’s where the influence on the front office will come from.” Female athletic trainers must continue to network and pursue the rare professional job almost relentlessly (1992, 14C). “Networking is pivotal for males as well as females. Working as interns during the summer will greatly increase chances” (Anonymous comment from survey, 2000).

### Repercussions of adding female athletic trainers to NFL staff

Of those surveyed, 40% marked strongly agree when asked if allowing female athletic trainers in the men's locker room is a double standard because men are not allowed in the women's locker room. Thirty-five percent marked agree and 25% marked neither agree nor disagree.

In response to the question of the opportunity for sexual harassment with a co-ed environment, 47.4% marked agree, 36.8% marked strongly agree, and 15.8% marked neither agree nor disagree. Thirty-five percent marked neither agree nor disagree when asked if athletes would have to curtail their behavior in a co-ed environment, 35% marked strongly agree, 25% marked agree, and 10% marked disagree.

The second research question explored the repercussions of the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs. Seventy-five percent either strongly agree or agree that allowing female athletic trainers into the men's locker room was a double standard because men are not allowed in the women's locker room. Of those surveyed, 84.2% either strongly agree or agree that the opportunity for sexual harassment would increase in a co-ed environment. In the review of literature there were several accounts of sexual harassment of female sports reporters in the men's locker room and female athletic trainers in the athletic training room. One of the athletic trainers surveyed anonymously commented, "The harassment case at the University of Tennessee a few years ago has done a lot to hurt the advancement of women in male oriented sports, regardless of who was right or wrong." There was no clear trend in the data for the



question of athletes having to curtail their behavior in the presence of a female athletic trainer.

“I think some players’ wives would feel uncomfortable with a female athletic trainer,” was an anonymous comment from one of the surveys. This issue was also discussed in the literature; Washington Capitals goalie Don Beaupre was quoted in a USA Today article by Tom (1992, pg 14c), as saying, “The first thing I’d think about is how would my wife feel? I don’t think she’d be too comfortable with it.”

#### Logistics of adding female athletic trainers to the NFL athletic training staff

When asked if the logistics of the location/layout of the athletic training room (being located in or adjacent to the men’s locker room) allows for a co-ed environment, 31.6% marked strongly agree, and 31.6% marked agree, 21.1% marked disagree, 10.5% marked neither agree nor disagree, and 5.3% marked strongly disagree.

Forty percent marked disagree when asked if an all-male environment was not conducive for a female athletic trainer, 25% percent marked neither agree nor disagree, 20% marked agree, 5% marked strongly agree, and 10% marked strongly disagree. Fifty-five percent marked agree when asked if there would have to be structural changes in the locker room and athletic training room to preserve the privacy of the male athletes if there were female athletic trainers in the NFL, 20% marked strongly agree, 15% marked disagree, and 10% marked neither agree nor disagree.

The third research question sought to understand the logistics of the addition of a female athletic trainer to NFL athletic training staffs. Of those surveyed, 63.2% strongly

agree or agree that the logistics of the athletic training room does not allow for a co-ed environment. Fifty percent either disagree or strongly disagree that an all-male environment was not conducive for a female athletic trainer, 75% either strongly agree or agree that there would have to be structural changes in the locker room to preserve the privacy of the male athletes if there were female athletic trainers in the NFL.

Those surveyed reported that there would need to be structural changes; however, the majority reported that the male-only environment was not the issue. “Some minor logistical adjustments were made (with a female intern in the NFL) and everything was fine” (Anonymous comment from survey, 2000). “Logistics make it difficult but not impossible” (Anonymous comment from survey, 2000).

Table 1. NFL Athletic Trainers Survey Outcome

Question	Responses									
	SA		A		NAD		D		SD	
	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f
1. Despite potential barriers there will be female athletic trainers in the NFL.	15	3	60	12	20	4	5	1	0	0
2. The logistics of the location/layout of the athletic training room (being located in the men's locker room) does not allow for a co-ed environment.	30	6	30	6	10	2	20	4	5	1
3. Allowing female athletic trainers in the male locker room is a double standard because males are not allowed in the women's locker room.	40	8	35	7	25	5	0	0	0	0
4. The opportunity for sexual harassment will increase with a co-ed environment.	35	7	45	9	15	3	0	0	0	0
5. Athletes will have to curtail their behavior in the training room (i.e. swearing, dirty jokes, etc.) if the environment is co-ed.	30	6	25	5	35	7	10	2	0	0
6. An all-male environment is not conducive for a female athletic trainer.	5	1	20	4	25	5	40	8	10	2
7. There would have to be structural changes in the locker room and training room to preserve the privacy of the male athletes if there were female athletic trainers in the NFL.	20	4	55	11	10	2	15	3	0	0
8. The addition of a female athletic trainer to the NFL staff will be a slow process.	15	3	65	13	20	4	0	0	0	0
9. The increased opportunity for female athletic trainers at the collegiate level will create more opportunities in the NFL.	20	4	50	10	20	4	10	2	0	0
10. Networking is a pivotal part of securing a job in the NFL.	25	5	65	13	10	2	0	0	0	0
11. NFL athletes who have had previous experience with female athletic trainers will have a positive effect in the acceptance of female athletic trainers.	20	4	65	13	10	2	0	0	0	0

## Qualitative Data

At the end of the survey there were lines for comments. Six of the athletic trainers surveyed responded to the open-ended portion of the survey. The comments were categorized according to the three factors addressed by the survey. There were comments given that directly related back to the review of literature.

### The future of female athletic trainers in the NFL

There were two quotes on the future of female athletic trainers in the NFL:

(1) “The first full time staff athletic trainer will be critical. If all goes well, the door will be open. If there are problems, it could set things back.” (2) “Networking is pivotal for males as well as females. Working as interns during the summer will greatly increase chances.”

### Repercussions of adding female athletic trainers to NFL staff

The comments regarding the repercussions of female athletic trainers in the NFL were: (1) “I think it is the perceptions of management and coaches which is slowing the process.” (2) “It is a difficult environment in which one must have thick skin (males included) ... the harassment case at University of Tennessee a few years ago has done a lot to hurt the advancement of women in male oriented sports, regardless of who is right or wrong.” (3) “I think some areas are being missed—dealing with ownership, head coaches, personnel directors, strength coaches, equipment managers, lawyers, agents,

public relations. It's not just the environment and location of the training room. Also, I think some players' wives would feel uncomfortable with a female trainer."

(4) "Allowing any female, not just athletic trainers into the men's locker room, is a double standard."

#### Logistics of adding female athletic trainers to the NFL athletic training staff

Two quotes were written in the comment section that dealt with the logistics of adding a female athletic trainer to the NFL staff: (1) "The logistics makes it difficult but not impossible." (2) "We have had a female intern athletic trainer ... some minor logistical adjustments were made and everything was fine."

The comments of the athletic trainers provided greater insight into the complexity of the problems involved with adding a female athletic trainer into the traditionally all-male environment. There are issues aside from those addressed by this study. Despite those issues, one NFL team was able to overcome the logistics and accommodate a female intern.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Female athletic trainers are graduating at almost equal rates as male athletic trainers from both undergraduate and graduate accredited athletic training educational programs. Female athletic trainers are underrepresented in professional sports and have yet to secure a full-time position in the NFL. Discrimination based on the applicant's sex is against the law and is a violation of the policies of the National Athletic Training Association. No studies on this subject were located. This study examined the future of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs, repercussions of the addition of female athletic trainers to NFL athletic training staffs, and the logistics of adding female athletic trainers to the NFL athletic training staff.

There are repercussions that would arise from the addition of a female athletic trainer to a NFL athletic training staff. There are logistical barriers that exist in the current layout of most NFL athletic training facilities. Despite those barriers, the majority of those surveyed reported that there would be a female athletic trainer in the NFL in the future. Women are now serving as athletic trainers in major colleges and universities, and even some minor league sports. As those athletes progress in their athletic careers, the acceptance of female athletic trainers will increase.

In general the NFL athletic trainers who responded to the survey believed that female athletic trainers will some day be a part of NFL athletic training staffs. There are repercussions that will occur, such as the possibility of sexual harassment and the possible behavioral changes. Logistical changes will have to occur to preserve the

privacy of the athletes. Though there were concerns, this study concluded that there is a future for female athletic trainers in the NFL.

This study explored the opinions of the athletic trainers employed in the spring of 2000 by the NFL. There is a need for further studies of the factors that are keeping female athletic trainers out of the NFL athletic training staffs. Future studies need to include the opinions of other professionals involved in the NFL such as: the owners, management, coaches, and athletes. Future studies also need to examine other professional sports' opinions of female athletic trainers.

#### POSTSCRIPT

Since this thesis was written the first female athletic trainer was hired by an NFL team. Ariko Iso accepted the assistant athletic training position with the Pittsburgh Steelers in the summer of 2002 (Mihoces, 2002).

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## APPENDIX A

### Sample Categorization of the Questions Into Domains

Instructions: These are the three domains that the questions were developed from. Please place each question into the domain that you think the question is gathering information about.

<u>The future of female</u>	<u>The repercussions of adding</u>	<u>The logistics of female</u>
<u>athletic trainers in the NFL</u>	<u>female athletic trainers to</u>	<u>athletic trainers in the NFL</u>
	<u>NFL staffs</u>	

The number of the question as it appears in the sample survey is listed.

---

3	2	1
4	6	8
5	7	9
		10
		11

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## APPENDIX B

### Sample Packet Mailed to all NFL Athletic Trainers

#### Sample Letter to Head Athletic Trainers

March 9, 2000

Head Athletic Trainer  
San Francisco 49ers  
555 Blank Lane  
Santa Clara, CA 90008

Dear Head Athletic Trainer:

I am a graduate student in the NATA accredited athletic training program at San Jose State University. I am requesting your assistance in gathering data for my thesis project. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Enclosed are questionnaires for you and your athletic training staff that take approximately 5 minutes to complete. The questionnaire is completely anonymous. There are self-addressed stamped envelopes or a fax number to return the questionnaire. Your input is greatly appreciated.

Thank you again for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Joi Dawson

Sample Informed Consent Form

**Responsible Investigator:** Joi Dawson  
**Title of Protocol:** Perceptions of Female Athletic Trainers

You have been asked to participate in a research study investigating perceptions of female athletic trainers. You have been asked to complete a one-page anonymous survey. There are no foreseeable risks anticipated. There are no discernable benefits or expected compensation for participating in the study. Results of the study may be published but no information that could identify you will be included.

Questions about the research may be address to Joi Dawson (650) 555-1111, or the graduate advisor, Dr. David Furst (408) 555-1222. Complaints about the research may be presented to the Department Chair, Dr. Carol Christensen (408) 555-1333. Questions or complaints about the research, subjects' rights, or research-related injury may be presented to Nabil Ibrahim, Associated Academic Vice-President for Graduate Studies and Research, at (408) 555-1444.

No service of any kind, to which you are otherwise entitled, will be lost or jeopardized if you choose to "not participate" in the study. If you decide to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with San Jose State University or any other participating institutions.

- The signature of the researcher on this document indicates agreement to include the complete survey in the research and attestation that the subject has been fully informed of his rights.

---

Investigator's Signature

---

Date

### Sample Survey Form

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. There will be full time female athletic trainers in the NFL in the future.					
2. The logistics of the athletic training room (being located in the men's locker room) does not allow for a co-ed environment					
3. Allowing female athletic trainers in the male locker room is a double standard because men are not allowed in the women's locker room.					
4. The opportunity for sexual harassment will increase with a co-ed environment in a NFL athletic training room.					
5. Athletes will have to curtail their behavior in the training room (i.e. swearing, dirty jokes, etc.) if the environment is co-ed.					
6. An all male environment is not conducive for a female athletic trainer.					
7. There would have to be structural changes in the locker room and athletic training room to preserve the privacy of the male athlete if there were female athletic trainers in the NFL.					
8. The addition of female athletic trainers to the NFL staff will be a slow process.					
9. The increase of opportunities for female athletic trainers to work collegiate football will create more opportunities in the NFL.					
10. Networking is a pivotal part of securing a job in the NFL.					
11. NFL athletes who have had previous experience with female athletic trainers will have a positive effect on the acceptance of female athletic trainers					

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please return in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided or fax to (408) 555-1212.

## APPENDIX C

### Sample Follow-up Letter

April 19, 2000

Head Athletic Trainer  
San Francisco 49ers  
555 Blank Lane  
Santa Clara, CA 90008

Dear Head Athletic Trainer:

In early March, I sent you an Athletic Training survey. I am a graduate student in the NATA accredited athletic training program at San Jose State University and the purpose of the survey is to gather information for my thesis.

If you have had an opportunity to complete the survey, your contribution is very much appreciated. If not, I have enclosed a duplicate of the survey for your convenience. Your input is needed.

Thank you again for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Joi Dawson